

CRITICAL DIGEST

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Theatre Diary

South Pacific-Broadway 6/29/53. Martha Wright and George Britton head cast of long run Rodgers and Hammerstein favorite which has just completed successful visit to Boston...The Little Clay Cart-Theatre de Lys 6/30/53. Fourth and final production presented by Terese Hayden. Hindu play written in 500 A.D. by King Shudraka, translated from Sanskrit by Arthur William Ryder. Edward G Green staged, cast includes Richard Waring, Sono Osato. Limited 1 week run.

Current Theatre Reviews

A Night in Venice-Jones Beach Theatre 6/25/53 Bigger and better in all departments. That's the unanimous opinion of the NY daily critics on Mike Todd's second season edition of the gigantic outdoor production of Johann Strauss operatta. Admittedly the fireworks, multi colored floats, mermaids, etc garnered more attraction than the singers, book or music, but all critics agreed that Ruth and Thomas Martin seemed to have tightened their book to make the old fashioned operatta more palatable. Raoul Pene DuNois scenery and costumes also were lauded. Major complaint once again was fact that the 90 foot lagoon between audience and actors. Cast leads, most of whom are playing their second summer, include Thomas Hayward, Jack Russell, Nola Fairbanks and Gloria Gilbert. Actually the show with a cast of 500, which will play for 10 weeks at the \$4 million stadium which seats 8000 nightly, defies criticism. Funke, Times, and Allison, Herald Tribune, admitted Strauss work itself is old fashioned, but both were impressed by the gigantic production. Chapman, News, taking note of the 16 gondolas in the show, suggested that the whole layout could be held over next year for a musical version of Time of the Cuckoo, if Shirley Booth can swir. Coleman, Mirror, settled for a "tuneful, stupendous," while Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, summed up the proceedings as "gigantic." Sheaffer, Eagle, noted that the involved, rather childish book didn't bother him as much this year as last. Though there is nothing static or subtle about Todd's whale sized show, summed up the reviewer, it is prime, relaxing entertainment for a hot summer evening.

The School for Scandal-Theatre de Lys- 6/23/53 Again mixed reviews were accorded the limited run Terese Hayden production. Most of NY first night critics recommended revival of Sheridan's comedy for serious students of drama, but they all listed complaints on unevenness of cast, lack of rehearsal time, and a variety of acting styles. Majority thought Patricia Neal was badly miscast. Atkinson, Times, thought the minor acting flaws were overcome by the worthy and apt script. Kerr, Herald Tribune, feared the stamp of the training school on the acting and direction was too much in evidence. Rice, Post, doubts very much if it is better to do a poor performance of a great classic than not to do it at all. Hawkins, WTAS, placed most of the blame on director Hayden for failing to keep the comedy moving briskly and gaily. O'Connor, subbing for McClain, Journal American, was of a different opinion. He filed a rave review in the language of the play's Mrs. Candour, who of course wouldn't want to repeat scandal but does. Sara Seegar, Joanna Roos, Leon Janney and David Stewart were credited with turning in the best performances.

Strawhat Tryouts

Second Fiddle, Mary Drayton's adaption of Ardyth Kennelly's novel about Mormons which closed last season on the road under the title "Salt of the Earth", was judged pretty minor Americana and thin theatre, at its current Westport, Conn. try, by Elem, Variety. Betty Field starred, Elmar Rice directed.

 ' Off Broadway '

Dramatists Forum celebrated its 5th anniversary at final session of season at Amato Opera Theatre. Group headed by Ray Yates meets weekly to aid aspiring playwrights with readings and discussions of new plays.

Concessions by theatre unions have been made to allow off Broadway theatres to act as showcases for talent and writers, Variety reporter explains. Circle in Square, Theatre de Lys, American Lyric Theatre and Lemonade Opera all provide \$25 per week to actors, plus \$5 per day rehearsal time. The ATPAM allows 1 man to act as manager-press agent at \$105-\$125 weekly, while the stagehands union allows one or two men to work for \$105-\$132 each. A treasurer is employed by each at \$50 per week. The return engagement of World of Sholem Aleichem, scheduled for the Barbizon Plaza Sept 11, will also operate under these rules.

 ' Vaudeville '

Lee Davis heads new Palace stage show. Dorothy Squires, Ann & George Oliver, Margaret Lynn Munn, Betty Vincent, Florida Trio, Beau Jenkins and Hank Simon complete the bill.

Radio City Music Hall "A Summer Medley" okayed by trade paper critics. Billboard pewsitter tabbed it a solid package full of flash, singing, novelty and some comedy, while Variety mugg thought all except operetta medley at end added up to a sprightly, smartly paced revue. Both critics enjoyed Jay Lawrence, young comedian, and Tom Parris Trio trampoline act. Electronic fireworks display at finale cheered by both reviewers as outstanding.

New Roxy ice show also lauded by both trade critics. The Bruises comedy act and Rolly Rolls were highspots in pleasant Penthouse Party setting. Jose, Variety, highlighted Eddie Brandstetter as an ice comic in the Freddie Trenkler tradition.

 ' Theatre Book Comment '

"The Player's Boy" by Bryher (Fanthorn) is a novel which will delight theatre fans, recommends Downing, Variety. English novelist is an Elizabethan specialist whose characters move with the feeling of persons who have lived in a magnificent age, but who are lost when the old order passes. Title character is a 'prentice lad in the London theatre of Beaumont and Fletcher.

"An Introduction to Eighteenth Century Drama" by Frederick S Boas (Oxford) was considered a disappointment to Appleton, Saturday Review. Critic hoped author who wrote two fine volumes on Tudor and Stuart drama would stick to subjects he knows about, and not wander into the Augustan age which he knows little about.

"Glitter" by A.B. Shiffryn (Popular Library) is a poor attempt at a Broadway novel by the author of Angel in the Pawnshop, pms Hobe, Variety. 25¢ paper bound novel is a pulp paper version of Broadway theatre which should be absorbing enough for lip moving readers, he noted, but hardly of concern to anyone in the trade.

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Green Room Department

INTERVIEWS PANNED...No more interviews with actors and actresses would be one of the first orders Nathan, Journal American, would give if he were a newspaper editor. The critic has yet to encounter one that was worth the paper it was printed on. Topics that space is wasted on in such reports include: how thrilled the young actress is to be on Broadway, what she did or did not eat for lunch, how wonderful the critics are to her. Also a tribute to Charles Frohman from the older actress, a few kind words for Shirley Booth, etc. Older actors will not excuse themselves from the interview and will hang around continuing to say nothing worth printing as long as the reporter keeps buying drinks, Nathan concludes.

COLUMN TIPS...Program sellers at Can-Can are being picketed because they don't belong to a union, reports Walker...Cab Calloway leaves Porgy and Bess July 4 due to a salary dispute, whispers Wilson...If a drama reporter picked up a lunch or bar bill, as Nathan claims above, he would be expelled from "Drama Desk" for conduct unbecoming a free loader, insists Winchell.

PARIS REPORT...The virtue of the French theatre today, sums up Clurman, Nation, who stopped in Paris on his way to Israel where he will direct Caesar and Cleopatra for the Habimah Theatre, lies in its wide range of plays. The direction of most of the Paris productions is of a rather slapdash sort, while the acting generally shows more scenic ebullience than finesse or depth. The best theatre work continues at the Comedie Francaise, Clurman feels, where the productions always are done with a certain polish. In May there were 42 plays running.

SOFAS & STARS...Typical of the warm feeling a summer theatre troupe can evoke in a friendly town is recalled by White, Herald Tribune. A theatre company who had borrowed an antique parlor sofa from the most reserved lady in town heard her say after she saw the play, "You know, that old sofa of mine was really well cast. It looked as if it had been in the theatre all its life! "...Film stars are playing coy with summer theatre producers this term because of the easier, more lucrative work available on TV and in night clubs, reports Hift, Variety.

DRINKING MAIL...Diverse opinions received by Chapman, News, who is seeking readers views on bars in theatres. Though one reader doubts if anyone could get drunk during a 10 minute intermission, he did doubt if it would stimulate theatre business. The operation of bars would make a gayer, more carefree atmosphere within each theatre, points out another. "Gintermissions" puns a Brooklyn fan should be the name of the breaks. While another wonders who would want to operate a bar for the possible profits from 25 minutes business per day. Sheaffer, Eagle, also believes that the cost of a liquor license is prohibitive for such a bar.

DOMESTIC PROBLEMS...Playwrights have right to be worried at the recent objects of the US Chamber Maid union who assert their profession had been ridiculed in Mid-Summer, warns "Stage" editorial. If the matter can't be patched up quietly the whole future of domestic comedy may be threatened. What will playwrights use instead of perky, semi-educated, irresponsible chambermaid to enliven a heavy scene?

Pros & Cons by TMK

Current dispute and efforts to find out if NY theatre patrons want bars in the playhouses gets an interesting answer at the current Theatre de Lys series. There the Good Humor man does a healthy business before, during and after the play. And you wouldn't need a license to sell ice cream in the theatre either.

Can-Can original cast album (Capitol) is a technically flawless reproduction of most of the music in the show. Except for several tunes, such as "Come Along With Me" the score and lyrics are not up to the usual Porter peak. But record is a must for all theatre fans who have audio collections of Broadway.

NYC Theatre News Round Up

Billy Rose promises to be the first New York theatre owner to make application for a bar in his playhouse, if and when the New York State legislature passes the same kind of a law which has just been approved by the New York City Council. The bill, an amendment to the NYC building code, allows the serving of liquor in legitimate theatres. Rose, whose Zeigfeld Theatre now houses Porgy and Bess but which he will use next season for 2 or 3 of his own productions, feels sure that the spacious first floor lounge of the theatre on 6th Ave and 54th St would make a comfortable and attractive bar. As predicted, Mayor Impellitteri signed the liquor amendment, but now the NY State Legislature will not consider it until January. Mild protests against the bill were voiced at a public hearing by several New York City Protestant and Women's Christian Temperance Union leaders.

Columbus Citizen's Show Train to NY will be run on a semi annual basis. Paper, which under leadership of Norman Nadal, drama editor, brought 250 in March for a solid week of playgoing, has announced a fall trip in October.

Plays

'A Night in Venice' show bus leaves nightly from Duffy Square at 47th St at 6 45 PM. Tickets are on sale at Bond's, 45th St and Broadway...The Crucible played with backdrops replacing the regular settings. E.G. Marshall moved into the leading role vacated by Arthur Kennedy...Time Out for Ginger closed at Lyceum after 248 performances, Misalliance closed after 148 performances at the Barrymore. Latter show was first money maker to achieve a run for NY City Center Theatre Company...Guys and Dolls NY Company moved to Washington, D.C. for run, returning to 46th St theatre Aug 10...3 more houses booked for the coming season. Anna Russell's Little Show, a revue featuring the British concert-comedienne promises to be the first show of the new season, opening at the Vanderbilt Sept 8. Tea and Sympathy, a new play by Robert Anderson which the Playwrights Company will produce at the Barrymore Sept 30, stars Deborah Kerr, directed by Elia Kazan. A Pin to See The Peep Show, new play which will introduce British actress-director team of Joan Miller and Peter Cotes to NY, opens Sept 17 at the Playhouse...NYC Center Fund Raising campaign, which has a goal of \$200,000 has reached the \$100,000 mark.

People

Lawrence Tibbett is rehearsing for his 10 performance guest appearance as Porgy in Porgy and Bess starting July 15...Catherine Van Buren has taken over the role of "Annie" in Porgy and Bess, replacing Catherine Ayers who has taken a 5 week leave of absence...Stewart Chaney will design the sets for Sherlock Holmes...Yul Brynner has returned to the title role of The King and I after an 11 week vacation...4 NYC theatre trucking firms, a labor union and their officers were indicted by a federal grand jury on charges of acquiring a virtual monopoly in transportation of theatrical and TV scenery in NY.

Theatre Film Notes

Top Banana, which has just closed in Los Angeles, will be filmed in Technicolor in 3 dimensions on a Hollywood theatre stage in July with the original Broadway cast starring Phil Silvers by Joe Justman and Gene Towne, independent film producers...Bing Crosby will star in Paramount's "The Country Girl", film version of Clifford Odets play...E.G. Marshall, The Crucible, signed to lead role in "The Caine Mutiny" film...4D movies tested by St. John Terrell, Lambertville, NJ, Music Circus producer. He has had his perfume factory in Chicago design odors to be sprayed along with movie shorts. These make, as one wag has already said, pictures that really smell.

